

Authenticity In Leadership And Performance: Does Inclusive Work Environment Matters?

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Abstract

This study examined *the effect of employees' sense of authenticity on innovative performance, and the relationship between customer-centric approach in decision-making, customer satisfaction and employee awareness of customer preferences*. The survey research approach was used. A purposeful sample of 259 individuals was used to select the participants for the study. The major tool for gathering data was a questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was assessed through Cronbach test. Construct validity was performed. Finding showed that a sense of authenticity has a significant positive effect on innovative performance. Research indicated that customer-centric decision-making process has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction but has insignificant effect on employee awareness of consumer preferences. The study established that both workplace inclusiveness and customer-centric decision-making are two important factors that have a positive influence on innovative performance and customer satisfaction, respectively. The study recommended that organizations should develop policies in workplaces that would promote the involvement, consideration, openness, and equal opportunities of their employees for them to have platforms to present their ideas. The management should also instill authentic leadership to motivate their workers.

Keywords: *Authentic Leadership, Innovative Performance, Decision-Making Processes, Customer Satisfaction, Customer-Centric Methods, Inclusive Workplace Environment.*

INTRODUCTION

Given the complexity of today's business world, with its rapid advancements in technology and variety of demographics within the workforce, inclusivity and integrity in leadership styles are required. One such leadership style that has been proven to be beneficial to the challenges of today's businesses is the concept of authentic leadership. As defined by scholars in the field (Kelly, 2023; Van-Loon, 2017), authentic leaders are those that exhibit their beliefs and ideals in chaotic situations. They provide stability for their organizations and followers by being true to themselves and their leadership styles. Manufacturing sector is one that highly values authenticity in leadership. Through numerous studies, it has been proven that authentic leaders experience increased engagement from their employees and exhibit cultures that are inclusive of the various individuals within the company (Karam et al., 2017; Maximo et al., 2019; Swain et al., 2018). Such inclusivity encourages creativity within the companies, which increases the innovative performance of those organizations.

Numerous previous studies (e.g., Chaudhary & Panda, 2018; Hadian et al., 2019; Mubarak & Noor, 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2018) have indicated the impact of authentic leadership on a variety of outcomes from organizations. Such outcomes include employee creativity, employee engagement with the organization, and even increased organizational

performance. Additionally, various researchers have correlated the authenticity of the leaders within an organization with the innovative performance of that organization, indicating that authentic leaders encourage creativity within their organizations and exhibiting an atmosphere that is receptive towards new ideas (Novitasari et al., 2020; Yamak & Eyupoglu, 2021). Furthermore, Luu (2020) indicated that authentic leadership also positively impacts the decision-making of those leaders, leading to increases in customer satisfaction. However, research regarding the outcomes of authentic leadership among employees in manufacturing companies is lacking in the literature. This new concept among managers and leaders has only recently been explored in the literature.

Despite the number of studies that exist regarding the various leadership styles and their impact on the organizations led by these managers, the impact of authentic leadership on innovative performance, decision-making, and customer satisfaction within the manufacturing companies of the Nigerian context has not been explored in previous studies. While many studies have indicated that authentic leadership improves trust and motivation amongst the employees within the organization (Ling et al., 2017; Maximo et al., 2019), few have explored how this leadership style has an impact upon the innovative performance of those organizations. Innovations within management and leadership that exhibit authenticity may focus on the demands of their customers and work to improve the quality of the services that they provide for them. However, there is still research gap regarding whether or not such impacts upon decision-making by the leaders of these organizations correlate to an increase in the satisfaction of their customers within the manufacturing sector of Southeast Nigeria. In addition to these management challenges, it is also well known that implementing practices that increase the level of inclusivity within the organization is associated with an increase in the engagement, retention, and morale of the employees within that company (Bannay et al., 2020; Cenkci et al., 2021; Kiradoo, 2022). However, few studies have explored whether authentic leadership has an impact upon the inclusivity of individuals within the manufacturing sector. Thus, the goal of this study is to develop a model that validates the sense of authenticity in leadership and organisational outcomes, and the importance inclusive work environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing volume of literature demonstrates the connection between leadership styles and organizational success, specifically in the context of authentic leadership. Scholars have largely recognized the value of authentic leadership and its significant impact on employee engagement and performance (Karam et al., 2017; Obuba, 2023; Winton et al., 2022). Workplaces that are focused on enabling employees of different backgrounds and beliefs to work together in a diverse and inclusive environment have a positive impact on the organization as a whole (Nishi & Leroy, 2022; Shore et al., 2018). These concepts contribute to the understanding of the impact of leadership on manufacturing workers and the organization as a whole.

Authentic leadership is marked by self-awareness, the use of transparent communication within the organization, adhering to ethical standards, and focusing on creating authentic relationships with those within the organization (Kelly, 2023). These traits are critical within the manufacturing sector. For instance, manufacturing plants often have numerous standards and regulations regarding the manufacturing process that must be adhered to. Leaders who exhibit authenticity can better understand their capabilities and limits in creating an atmosphere

where employees are likely to engage in communication and problem-solving with others in the organization (Jamil & Sarwar, 2023; Kleynhans et al., 2021; Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz, 2019). In addition, the emphasis on creating authentic relationships within the manufacturing plant can help create trust between the managers and the employees, which is necessary for the manufacturing process (Gill et al., 2018; Swain et al., 2018).

An inclusive workplace fosters environments that are diverse in their employees and allow for all individuals to feel as though they belong to the organization (Hur, 2020; Shore et al., 2018). These elements are vital to manufacturing for a variety of reasons. For example, manufacturing environments may have employees of many different origins, backgrounds, and experiences. By ensuring that all individuals feel as though they are appreciated by the organization, the employee satisfaction and retention of those workers can be increased (Randel et al., 2018). Additionally, using different viewpoints and experiences to contribute to manufacturing processes can increase the innovation of the products that are produced by those plants (Madera et al., 2023).

The qualities that characterize authentic leadership are essential for individuals in the manufacturing sector. For instance, manufacturing often requires adhering to various standards. Leaders who exhibit authentic leadership are more likely to encourage employees to adhere to these standards and foster environments of commitment towards the organization and its manufacturing standards (Alavi & Gill, 2017; Joo & Jo, 2017). Furthermore, the emphasis on relationships within authentic leadership helps to foster a relationship among the employees where there is an expectation of accountability and respect for the work that each individual performs in the manufacturing plant. An inclusive environment in manufacturing can reflect the importance of these concepts on the employees and the innovation of the manufacturing plants. Specifically, allowing individuals of different backgrounds and viewpoints to have part of the manufacturing process is vital for those types of industries to continue to evolve and create innovations in response to the ever-evolving technological innovations in the manufacturing industry (Beverelli et al., 2017).

Theoretical Review and Hypothetical Development

Avolio and Gardner (2005) presented the theory of authentic leadership, emphasizing the importance of transparency, ethical behavior, and a strong relational aspect of leadership. This theory posits that leaders who exhibit self-awareness, properly process information, and exhibit ethical behavior will create an atmosphere within the organization that is characterized by transparency, trust, and improved organizational commitment to the tasks they perform. The focus on the relational aspect of authentic leadership creates an environment in the organization that promotes employees' engagement with their jobs and encourages them to exhibit creativity in the performance of those tasks (Baquero, 2023; Maximo et al., 2019). The relational aspect of authentic leadership may allow employees feel empowered to exhibit creativity and to show autonomy in the decisions they make in the manufacturing plants. (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In the manufacturing industry, authentic leadership could exhibit the characteristics that would promote team motivation and cohesion. This could allow teams to create innovative results for customers and improve customer satisfaction. The ethical attitude exhibited in authentic leadership may allow leaders to make decisions that focus on the customer and improve the customer experience, ultimately promoting customer satisfaction.

The theory of authentic leadership may have a significant influence on innovative performance in organizations, particularly in manufacturing companies. The authenticity of

leadership allows these leaders to inspire their employees and motivate them to immerse themselves in the tasks they are responsible for, which is crucial for promoting innovation in the manufacturing sector (Laguna et al., 2019; Luu, 2020). Furthermore, research by Mohamed & Elsehrawy (2023) and Ribeiro et al. (2020) exhibits that authentic leaders exhibit significantly enhanced creativity performances from their employees. Authentic leaders enable an environment that encourages employees to innovate without fear of being punished. Authentic leaders promote psychological safety, which is crucial for allowing employees to provide original ideas for improving the performance and outcomes of the organizations (Schuckert et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2017). They encourage them to dedicate themselves to the ethical principles of the organization, and motivate them in ways beyond monetary rewards (Maximo et al., 2019; Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2022). Hence, the hypothesis that:

H₁: Employees' sense of authenticity has effect on innovative performance.

Decision-making is another crucial aspect of customer satisfaction, especially if the decisions relate to the requirements and expectations of the customers (Keiningham et al., 2019; Mofokeng, 2021). Manufacturing companies must ensure that the processes involved in production, quality control, and distribution are in alignment with the requests made by their customers to ensure that they consistently deliver a high-quality product. Research studies show that decision-making that is centred on the customer will result in higher levels of customer satisfaction as the outcomes of the organizations will align with the customers' expectations (Madhani, 2018). Additionally, if the manufacturing organizations make decisions that focus on the quality of their products and the feedback that they receive from their customers, they will receive higher levels of satisfaction from the customers. When the customers are involved in the decision-making of a company, the organization can better align with the customer's perspective on the organization's products. This allows them to better identify and resolve any issues that may be adversely affecting the customer experience. Research studies demonstrate that involving the customers in the decision-making of a company will have a beneficial effect on the customers' experience with the company (Liu & Li, 2018; Madhani, 2021a; Madhani, 2021b). Through involving the customers in the decision-making of a manufacturing organization, there will be room for more flexible modifications to the manufacturing processes to accommodate the requirements and preferences of the customers, which will ultimately enhance their satisfaction with the organization. Moreover, decision-making that is centred on quality is another essential element of the manufacturing industry as the customers' satisfaction with the products manufactured by these organizations is directly related to the quality of these products. Research studies indicate that manufacturing companies that use decision-making frameworks and regulate the quality of their products will experience fewer faults in these products, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction with the products that are made by these organizations (Aljohani, 2023; Popović et al., 2018; Psarommatis et al., 2022). If the leaders in these organizations make decisions that focus on implementing rigorous quality standards into their manufacturing processes, they will enhance the customers' experience with the organization. Additionally, using a customer-centric approach to decision-making will ultimately allow the employees of these organizations to better understand what type of products the customers desire, leading to the creation of superior products.

H₂: Customer-centric approach in decision-making is associated with customer satisfaction.

H₃: Customer-centric approach in decision-making has a relationship with employee awareness of customer preferences.

Authentic leadership positively impacts the creation of an inclusive work environment within the organization (Boekhorst, 2014; Obuba, 2023), and therefore, it positively impacts organizational performance. Within the manufacturing firms that utilize this type of leadership style, the result is the creation of an environment that is trusting and communicative to the individuals within the group (Boekhorst, 2014; Maximo et al., 2019).

By emphasizing the idea of openness, ethics, and the relationship between the individuals within the manufacturing plant, each individual within that company begins to feel as if they are included within the company and that their different cultures are welcomed.

Additionally, because they feel as if they are valued within the manufacturing facility, they begin to feel motivated to perform at their highest potential. It is supported by research evidence that adopting inclusive practices in the manufacturing sector will result in enhanced productivity among firms in this sector (Atiku et al., 2024; Okatta et al., 2024).

The leadership style known as authentic leadership fosters inclusiveness among teams in that it emphasizes the importance of having genuine interaction with team members and getting their feedback in an effort to appreciate the contribution made by each individual worker to the firm (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Inclusiveness promotes innovation in the manufacturing sector by encouraging team members to exchange ideas.

The ethical and relational foundation of authentic leadership also has a positive impact on the morale and teaming within the manufacturing companies. As authentic leaders seek to provide equitably for all individual employees and teams within the company and value diversity in the workplace, they aggressively seek to promote the contributions of each employee to the company's operations (April et al., 2023; Srivastava et al., 2022). As a result of implementing these practices, there is an immediate effect on manufacturing company performance.

In teams that implement an inclusive environment, employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and taking on new challenges. These manufacturing companies that promote an inclusive atmosphere to their employees experience improvements in their teaming, innovation, and operational effectiveness.

Authentic leadership within the manufacturing industry also impacts the performance of these organizations as a whole. Companies that foster an inclusive atmosphere for all employees experience a reduction in employee turnover and an improvement in employee satisfaction (Adegoke et al., 2023; Sood et al., 2023).

Additionally, authentic leaders successfully alleviate the negative impacts of the high-stress environment within the manufacturing sector by fostering inclusivity within these organizations (Khan et al., 2022; Vem et al., 2017; Xu & Pang, 2024). As a result, employees feel better cared for by the company and become enthusiastic about performing their best and engaging in the organization's other operational improvements, which ultimately impact manufacturing company performance and customer satisfaction.

H4: Inclusive workplace environment has effect on innovative performance.

H5: The interaction between authentic leadership and inclusive workplace environment has effect on innovative performance.

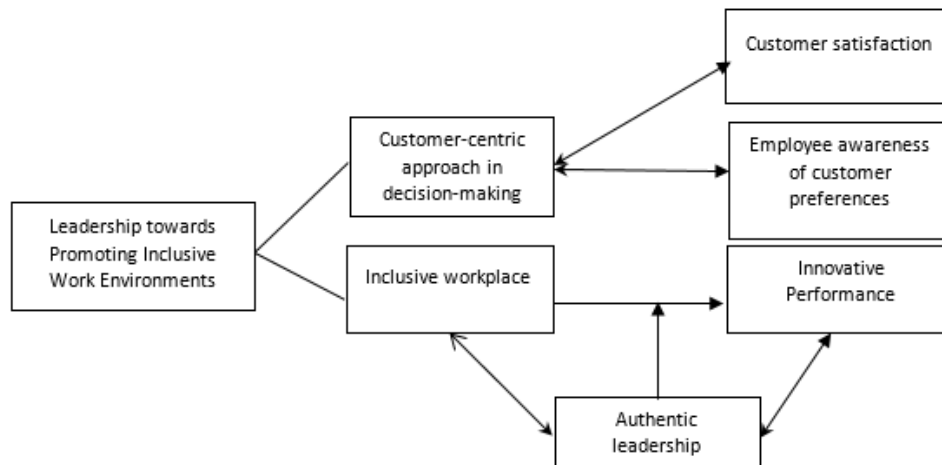


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodology was used to investigate the subject matter in a comprehensive manner in Southeast Nigeria. This methodology allows for the accurate measurement of various variables and the relationships between those variables (Duckett, 2021).

Research Design

The survey research approach was used. Using this approach to the study would be effective in obtaining results that can be generally applied to other populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The use of a survey would guarantee that all participants would be assessed in the same manner and allow for the performance of the statistical analysis necessary to draw conclusions from the research study.

Participants, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The population of this study consisted of individuals who work in the manufacturing industry in Southeast Nigeria. A purposeful sample of 259 individuals was used to select the participants for the study. This was achieved through snowball sampling method. The first wave of participants that were recruited include individuals who have adequate experience and knowledge about the subject matter. These individuals were supervisors who have demonstrated leadership in their various teams. The snowball sampling method was used to gather other participants who could contribute to the study. It helped to address the difficulties in finding and locating the required participants within the large workforce in the area of study (Brown, 2021; DasGupta, 2018; Soderlund & Wennerholm, 2021).

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

The data was collected through email and in-person questionnaires distributed to the participants to ensure that experienced individuals in the Southeastern region of Nigeria have the opportunity to complete the study. The use of these methods ensured that the study successfully obtains the sample of participants that it requires. Furthermore, ethical standards was followed in the performance of the research study. For example, informed consent was obtained from each of the participants, and precautions was taken to ensure the privacy of the participants, ensuring that no personally identifiable information was collected during the

research. Finally, the study complied with ethical standards that were dictated by some managers.

Data Acquisition Procedure

The major tool for gathering data was a questionnaire. The questionnaire sought data on variables. These variables were assessed on Likert scales to determine the experiences of each of the participating employees. This data collection process occurred over a period of eight months. Measures were taken to assess the test-retest reliability of the instrument. The questionnaire was distributed to a group of individuals (who were not part of the original survey) at two different time points within a short period of time. The reliability of the instrument was assessed through Cronbach test. The result must be 0.70 or higher. This will show that the items measure the construct reliably (Ekolu & Quainoo, 2019; McNeish, 2018; Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). Table 1 shows that the constructs are valid and reliable. The values for validity and reliability are above 0.70.

Table 1: Constructs' validity and reliability

Indicator Variable	AVE	CR	Cronbach (α)
Sense of authenticity (SOA)	0.646	0.804	0.848
Customer-centric approach in decision-making (CAD)	0.648	0.805	0.735
Consumer satisfaction (CUS)	0.700	0.836	0.776
Innovative performance (INP)	0.681	0.825	0.750
Employee awareness of customer preferences (EAC)	0.666	0.816	0.876
Inclusive workplace environment (IWE)	0.658	0.811	0.814

Source: Amos-IBM

Note: composite reliability-CR; Average Variance Expected- AVE

The results (in Table 1) shows strong reliability of constructs, given sense of authenticity ($\alpha= 0.848$), customer-centric approach in decision-making ($\alpha= 0.735$), consumer satisfaction ($\alpha= 0.776$), innovative performance ($\alpha= 0.750$), employee awareness of customer preferences ($\alpha= 0.876$), and inclusive workplace environment ($\alpha= 0.814$). The results Cronbach's show that the scale is robust and has a good measurement. The AVE values shows that the indicators are good metrics. The CR values correspondingly show that the items measure the constructs well. This simply means that there is high level of convergent validity, with respect to the measurement.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

Indicator Variable	SOA	CAD	CUS	INP	EAC	IWE
SOA	0.804	0.073				
CAD	0.073	0.805				
CUS			0.836	0.208	0.457	0.520
INP			0.208	0.825	0.491	0.572
EAC			0.457	0.491	0.816	0.563
IWE			0.520	0.572	0.563	0.811

Source: IBM

Table 2 indicates that the Fornell-Larcker criterion unveils a good discriminant validity. From the results, values of the correlation among variables range from 0.073 to 0.563. The highest value is found to be 0.697 for the relationship between IWE and EAC while the lowest value is found to be 0.073 for the relationship between SOA and CAD. None of the values are

greater than the square of AVE. This means that there is a good discriminant validity between all variables in models.

Data Analyses Methods

We analyzed the gathered data using statistical software (SPSS & Amos) to ensure precision and efficacy. We computed descriptive statistics to capture participant demographics. We employed construct validity with the use of Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant test. For the validity, the CR and AVE values must surpass the established thresholds (CR > 0.7, AVE > 0.50). Model fit was tested alongside the Structural Equation Model employed for factor loading. Regression analysis was used for testing hypothesis.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Responses	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	139	53.7
	Female	120	46.3
Age	18—30	90	34.7
	31—43	104	40.2
	44—56	46	17.8
	57 years and above	19	7.3
Marital Status	Single	92	35.5
	Married	157	60.6
	Widow(er)	10	3.9
Educational Level	OND/NCE	121	46.7
	HND/B.Sc	67	25.9
	MBA/M.Sc	62	23.9
	PhD	9	3.5
Experience	below 5 year	24	9.3
	6-11 years	96	37.1
	12-17 years	91	35.1
	18-23 years	20	7.7
	24-29 years	20	7.7
	30-35 years	8	3.1

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 3 shows that 53.7% of participants were male, while 46.3% were female participants. The results show that 34.7% of the participants were in the age range of 18-30 years, 40.2% were in the age range of 31-43 years, 17.8% were in the age range of 44-56 years, and 7.3% were aged 57 and above. It is evident from the data provided that many of the participants fall within the age range of 18 to 43 years, and few others belonged to the higher age brackets.

The results show that 35.5% of the participants were single, 60.6% were married, and 3.9% were widow(er). It is worth noting that 46.7% of the participants had an OND/NCE education level, 25.9% held an HND/B.Sc. degree, 23.9% held an MBA/MSc degree, and 3.5% were holders of a PhD. This means that most of the participants were OND/NCE holders, while a few were holders of higher educational levels like MBA/MSc or PhD. Where 9.3% of the participants had less than 5 years of experience, 37.1% had 6-11 years, 35.1% had 12-17 years, 7.7% had 18-23 years, 7.7% had 24-29 years, and 3.1% had more than 30 years of experience.

Table 4: Model Fit Summary

Fit Indices	Model	Default Model	Saturated Model	Independence Model
RMR, GFI	RMR	.067	.000	.512
	GFI	.880	1.000	.216
	AGFI	.859		.167
	PGFI	.747		.203
Baseline Comparisons	NFI (Delta1)	.959	1.000	.000
	RFI (rho1)	.955		.000
	IFI (Delta2)	.990	1.000	.000
	TLI (rho2)	.989		.000
	CFI	.990	1.000	.000
RMSEA	RMSEA<0.08	.034		.327
	LO 90	.026		.323
	HI 90	.041		.332
	PCLOSE	1.000		.000

Source: Amos-IBM

Table 4 shows the value of the RMR (0.067), indicating that the default model is a satisfactory fit to the data. The GFI score of 0.880 shows that the model is a relatively favorable fit. The AGFI of 0.859 indicates an acceptable fit. Similarly, the PGFI of 0.747 shows that there is an acceptable balance between the variables. The NFI score of 0.959, the RFI of 0.955, the IFI of 0.990, the TLI of 0.989, and the CFI of 0.990 all show a good fit, as they are close to the value of 1.0. The value of RMSEA is 0.034, with a confidence interval between 0.026 and 0.041, suggesting an excellent fit of the model. The value of the PCLOSE is 1.000, indicating that the RMSEA is not statistically different from 0.

Table 5: Regression Test (Hypothesis 1, 4 & 5)

Variable	Coe (β)	Std. Error	t-Stat	P-value
C	0.254	0.263	0.964	0.336(>0.05)
SOA	0.535	0.083	6.489	0.000(<0.01)
IWE	0.190	0.098	1.937	0.054(=0.05)
AL*IWE	0.047	0.025	1.899	0.059(>0.05)

$R^2 = 0.768$; F-stat= 282.048; Prob(F-stat) < 0.001; S.E. of regression= 0.661; Sum sq² residual= 111.304; Durbin-Watson stat= 1.626

Table 5 shows the R-squared value of 0.768. This is a robust fit as the model shows that authentic leadership accounts for 76.8% of the variation in innovative performance. The F-statistic (282.05, $p < 0.001$) indicate that the model is statistically significant in its entirety. The regression results show the link between innovative performance (INP) and organizational variables such as inclusive workplace environment (IWE), a sense of authenticity (SOA), and the interaction term AL*IWE. Authentic leadership has a significant positive effect on innovative performance ($\beta = 0.535$; t-stat= 6.489; p -value < 0.01). This means that 53.5% change in authenticity will lead to proportionate mean change in innovative performance. This implies that employees who experience the presence of authentic leadership are more likely to perform more innovatively. Inclusive workplace environment has a significant positive effect on innovative performance ($\beta = 0.190$; t-stat= 1.937; p -value =0.05). It shows that 19% change in inclusive workplace environment will amount to proportional positive change in innovative performance. Although the result shows a marginally significant link, but it indicates that a more inclusive workplace environment will contribute significantly to innovative performance.

The interaction term (authentic leadership and inclusive workplace environment) has a coefficient of 0.047 with a p-value greater than 0.05. This implies that while the combined effect of authentic leadership and an inclusive workplace environment is positive, it is not significant. This implies that the presence of both authentic leadership and an inclusive workplace environment cannot together enhance innovative performance because the effect is not significant.

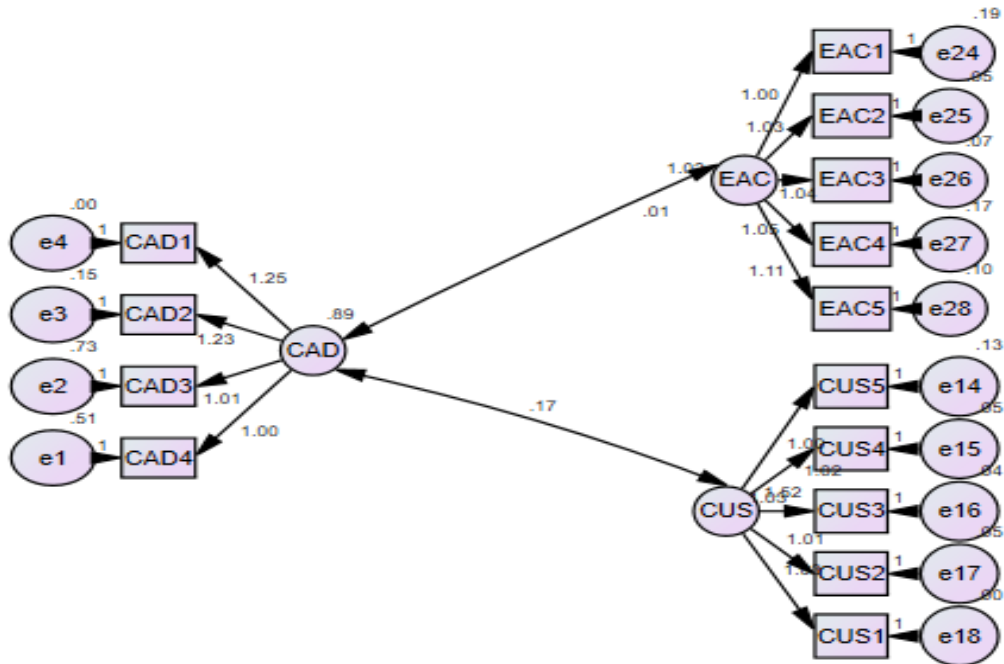


Figure 1: Structural Equation Modelling

Source: Amos-IBM

Table 6: Correlation Test (Hypothesis 2 & 3)

	Variables		Coeff (β)	S.E.	C.R.	P-Value
CAD	<-->	CUS	.169	.074	2.296	.022
CAD	<-->	EAC	.007	.059	.127	.899

Source: Amos-IBM

Table 6 shows that customer-centric decision-making process has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta= 0.169$; CR= 2.296; p-value < 0.05). The relationship is statistically significant, showing that when customer-centric decision-making changes by 16.9%, similar change will occur in customer satisfaction. This means that prioritizing customer-centric approaches in decision-making enhances customer satisfaction. The results also show that customer-centric decision-making has insignificant effect on employee awareness of consumer preferences ($\beta=0.007$; CR= 0.127; p-value > 0.05).

DISCUSSION

Finding shows that a sense of authenticity has a significant positive effect on innovative performance. This indicates that incorporating authenticity in leadership in the workplace may lead to enhanced levels of innovation within the organization. The finding corresponds to those of Alzghoul et al. (2018) and Hadian and Afshari (2019) in that authentic leadership was found to have a positive effect upon job performance.

Additionally, the findings of Novitasari et al. (2021) support these findings in that employees who feel a sense of authentic leadership within their organization exhibited innovative behavior. The findings of the research showed that both the inclusive workplace environment and the employees' sense of authenticity significantly impact innovative performance. From the studies in the field, those who work in an inclusive environment feel accepted, respected, and allowed to be themselves at work, all of which allow them to contribute creatively to the organization. Randel et al. (2018) noted that the use of an inclusive leadership style would help develop among the employees a sense of belongingness and uniqueness in relation to the organization. Shore et al. (2018) argued that when organizations are inclusive of their employees, they motivate them to become involved in team activities and projects, have confidence in their abilities to know things, and communicate their knowledge to other members of the organization.

Laguna et al. (2019) found that authentic leaders play a crucial role in the innovative performance of people from different countries. Ribeiro et al. (2020) also discovered the same, stating that authentic leadership increases individual creativity within the organization due to the emotional attachment that employees have with the organization. Finally, Xu et al. (2017) discovered that authentic leadership increases employee creativity in the workplace due to the trust and relationships that are formed within the workplace. However, the interaction effect between the inclusive workplace environment, authentic leadership, and innovative performance was not significant. This indicates that while both variables have significant impacts on innovative performance, there is no significant relationship between these three variables. Perhaps this is due to the fact that authentic leadership alone provides enough trust within the organization for employees to innovate ideas for the organization.

Research indicates that customer-centric decision-making process has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction but has insignificant effect on employee awareness of consumer preferences. Companies that focus their decision-making on the customers will experience higher levels of customer satisfaction. This finding is in line with the findings of Madhani (2018), who also discovered that focusing on the customer will allow organizations to understand the customers' expectations and the satisfaction that they can render to the customers. Furthermore, the impact of a customer-centric decision-making process on customer satisfaction is also in line with the findings of Kreuzer, et al. (2020). These authors also discovered that a customer-centric process will enhance the effectiveness of an organization and the value that it can provide to its customers. Furthermore, Azeem, et al. (2022) found that a customer-centric strategy will enhance the management of the relationships between the customers and the organizations and increase the level of customer satisfaction.

Additionally, Mofokeng (2021) also found that focusing on the customer while enacting online shopping will enhance the level of satisfaction and loyalty that customers offer to an organization. However, there was no significant effect of a customer-centric decision-making process on the awareness of employees of consumer preferences. This finding shows that despite the focus of organizations on decisions that cater to the customers, the awareness of employees of customer preferences may not necessarily increase.

This could potentially be due to the focus of the organizations on customer-centric decisions at the management level rather than the communication of such customers' preferences to the employees at all operational levels of the organization.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study established that both workplace inclusiveness and customer-centric decision-making are two important factors that have a positive influence on innovative performance and customer satisfaction, respectively. The study showed that employees will perform more innovatively within an environment that is inclusive, authentic, trustworthy, and supportive of those within the organization, as will organizations that make decisions regarding the organization with a focus on the customers of that organization. However, the study showed that the effect of an inclusive workplace environment upon the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative performance was not significant, as was the effect of the customer-centric nature of an organization upon the awareness of employees of consumer preferences.

Taking into account the results of the research, organizations are advised to develop policies in workplaces that would promote the involvement, consideration, openness, and equal opportunities of their employees for them to have platforms to present their ideas. The management should also instill authentic leadership to motivate their workers. Furthermore, all organizations must ensure that their customer-centric decision-making processes are properly communicated to their employees to improve their awareness of customers' demands and preferences. Additionally, by establishing channels through which employees can learn more about customers' expectations and demands, the employees can better incorporate customer-focused strategies into their jobs, improving customer satisfaction as well as the employees' effectiveness in their roles.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study has contributed to the existing knowledge in that it has provided evidence of the effect of an inclusive workplace environment and employee authenticity on innovative performance within organizations. The study expanded the literature on authentic leadership and inclusion in the workplace in that it demonstrated that employees are more innovative in environments that are accepting, trusting, open, and supportive of employees. Theoretically, this study has contributed to the knowledge of the field in that it showed that the inclusive environment did not significantly moderate the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative performance in employees, indicating that authentic leadership alone may be sufficient to promote innovative performance by employees within the organization. Additionally, this study has contributed to the existing customer management literature in that it confirmed the impact of making customer-centric decisions on the satisfaction of customers of the organization. However, it also showed that making customer-centric decisions does not necessarily lead to employees becoming aware of the preferences of the consumers of the organization's products or services.

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